

Fire in the sky

1-4 ADA blasts *Putlos*

Story and photos by
Sgt. Gregory F. Withrow
1st Armored Division PAO

PUTLOS, Germany – Roaring anti-aircraft rockets, thundering anti-armor missiles and ricocheting rounds all shattered the silence as the 1st Armored Division hosted an annual aerial gunnery along Germany's wind-swept coast on the North Sea. Four hundred United States Army, Europe, soldiers from 1st Armored Division, 1st Infantry Division and 69th Air Defense Artillery Brigade engaged and swatted aerial targets from the skies and mowed down enemy armored and troop targets, Sept. 3 – 14.

Loud cracking and popping followed by earth-shaking

thunder came from all directions as soldiers maximized their training opportunities on Putlos Training Area's five different gunnery ranges.

"We are firing every piece of equipment that we have in the battalion here at Putlos, which is why this range is so great," exclaimed Lt. Col. Christopher J. Putko, commander of 1AD's 1st Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, based in Wackernheim, Germany. The battalion's soldiers fired 9 mm pistols, M-16A2 rifles, .50-caliber machine guns, Claymore anti-personnel mines and the Bradley Fighting Vehicles' 25 mm cannons and coaxial 7.62 mm machine guns.

Air defense soldiers also fired TOW anti-armor rockets from Bradleys and Stinger anti-

aircraft missiles from turret-mounted Avenger HMMWVs and Man-portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADs).

The victims of these assaults included stationary targets, but also something more challenging.

Air defense soldiers trained their targeting reticles on remote control 1/9th scale aerial targets (RCMATs) and ballistics aerial targets (BATs). The soldiers pushed their gunnery skills to the limits as RCMATs simulated former Soviet Union HIND helicopters and FROG anti-armor fixed-wing aircraft. These targets, controlled by civilian technicians, are highly maneuverable and have unpredictable flight paths.

The soldiers also tested their abilities to quickly ac-

quire, identify and destroy targets. Gunners have only a few seconds to kill a BAT after the target launches, screaming into the sky.

Air defense soldiers also used the Bradley Fighting Vehicles' 25 mm cannons to take down aerial targets. Sgt. Hugh Anthony McNinch, a Bradley gunner from 1-4 ADA, proved the 25 mm cannon's worth over and over again.

"Today we were going down Table 10 qualifications for advanced gunnery and we were going through the table and they were flying RCMATs today and I shot down three [helicopters]," explained McNinch, smiling. McNinch's confidence and experience allowed him to destroy all three aerial targets presented to

Air defense soldiers from 1-4 ADA fire a MANPAD, launching a Stinger anti-aircraft missile at a speeding ballistic aerial target, Sept. 2001.